

Implementation Team Meeting Notes

May 5, 2005
National Marine Fisheries Service Offices
Portland, OR

1. Greetings and Introductions.

Today's IT meeting was chaired by Jim Ruff and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the topics discussed and decisions made at today's meeting. Anyone with questions or comments about today's meeting should contact Kathy Ceballos at 503/230-5420.

2. Updates.

A. In-Season Management (TMT). Cindy Henriksen said that, at yesterday's meeting, the TMT discussed the May early-bird forecast, which was down slightly from the April mid-month. It still is a below-average water year in 2005. At Grand Coulee, the forecast is down to 83% of average, just over 53 MAF; at Lower Granite, 11.1 MAF, 52% of average; at The Dalles, 69% of average. We're still in the lower tier of flow objectives for spring flow at Lower Granite and McNary, Henriksen said – 85 Kcfs and 220 Kcfs, respectively. The April-June spring flow for Lower Granite is expected to be 56-57 Kcfs, up slightly from the April final forecast, but well below the 70 Kcfs spill threshold. At McNary, the expected spring-period average flow is 165-170 Kcfs. At Priest Rapids, it looks as though the average will be perhaps 130 Kcfs, compared to the 135 Kcfs flow objective.

With respect to project operations, Libby and Hungry Horse remain on minimum outflow and continue to fill, said Henriksen. The April final water supply forecast was 5.4 MAF at Libby, which indicates an 800 kaf sturgeon operation (Tier I) in 2005. We haven't received a specific request yet for a sturgeon operation this year; we're anticipating a request for flow in May, she said. At Grand Coulee, the reservoir is still operating just below elevation 1255; it looks like the drum gate repairs will be completed on schedule, some time around May 15. At Dworshak, the reservoir is at about elevation 1593; this morning, we increased flow to full powerhouse plus spill (about 14 Kcfs total). According to our forecasts, there is water available for flow augmentation at Dworshak this spring, Henriksen said. The additional flow from Dworshak should push the flow at Lower Granite above 50 Kcfs, potentially as high as 60 Kcfs. On the Mid-

Columbia, Reclamation will begin augmenting flow at Priest Rapids next week, increasing it to 135 Kcfs as a week-average.

Any sense of what the next few weeks will mean in terms of reservoir elevations at Grand Coulee? Bill Tweit asked. We expect that this request will draft Grand Coulee by a few feet next week, Henriksen replied. We have not yet talked about what flow may be desired after next week. What are the prospects for Grand Coulee refill? Ruff asked. We expect to see the project refill to about 1285 feet, depending on how long this operation continues, Henriksen replied. At yesterday's TMT meeting, the action agencies asked to keep the flow target somewhat lower – around 130 Kcfs – next week, in order to keep Grand Coulee elevation somewhat higher, but this is the compromise operation we reached, she said.

At Dworshak, you increased flow to about 14 Kcfs this morning? Ruff asked. Correct, Henriksen replied – we're spilling up to the Idaho state TDG standard. We will revisit that operation at a conference call next Wednesday. And these flow requests are in response to the fact that we're seeing peak numbers of migrating juveniles, currently? Ruff asked. Yes, Dave Wills replied – the salmon managers discussed the tradeoffs between Grand Coulee refill and spring flow augmentation. It's going to be tight, but the feeling at yesterday's meeting was that we could do this operation and still refill Grand Coulee to 1285, and perhaps as high as 1288, this year.

Bill Hevlin noted that the RSW was operated twice for a few hours this weekend at Lower Granite, because so many juveniles were arriving at the raceways that they were overloading the barge loading facility.

At Bonneville, said Henriksen, the new spillway calibrations are in use. This year, when the data shows 75 Kcfs of spill during the day, it really is 75 Kcfs. Last year, when the data showed 75 Kcfs spill, the actual number was closer to 45 Kcfs. We have been spilling 75 Kcfs during the day and up to the gas cap – 120% in the tailrace – at night. The gas cap has been 80-85 Kcfs because we have been bumping up against the gas cap at the Camas/Washougal monitoring station. Jim Adams has determined that, even at 75 Kcfs around the clock, we were exceeding the gas cap at Camas/Washougal in late afternoon and early evening, Henriksen said. At yesterday's meeting, it was agreed to go to 65 Kcfs around the clock at Bonneville. We are exploring our options, and may go to 50 Kcfs during the day and 60-65 Kcfs at night, she said.

This is news to me, and it's a little troubling, said Ruff – last year, I thought the gas cap was closer to 125 Kcfs at night. What would that equate to this year, now that the spill flow data are more accurate? That would have been spill flow of about 65 or 70 Kcfs, Henriksen said. I know this is probably a Water Quality Team issue, said Ruff, but I also know that the majority of the WQT believes that the Camas/Washougal gauge is inaccurate and unrepresentative of the gas in the river as a whole. Their feeling is that

TDG should be managed using the Bonneville tailrace gauge, rather than the Camas/Washougal gauge, said Ruff.

Rock Peters replied that, when tailwater elevations are as low as they are now, this produces a plunging flow that actually goes over the flow deflectors, entraining more gas. The bottom line is that I would be cautious in making those types of determinations, he said. The WQT meets next week, and I would like to hear what they have to say about it, said Ruff. Once they have that discussion, he said, I think it would be appropriate to bring this issue back to IT to see whether we can reach consensus on how we should be measuring gas below Bonneville. We'd like to know whether the data that is being produced at the Camas/Washougal gauge is limiting our fish passage at Bonneville, said Ruff. It was agreed that it may be necessary to convene an IT conference call to discuss this issue again once the WQT completes its deliberations.

B. TMDL Update. No TMDL update was presented at today's meeting.

3. Update on Lower Monumental Spill Study Decision.

Bill Hevlin said that, at the recent IT/SCT conference call on April 21, the two groups were able to reach resolution on a Lower Monumental spill study this spring. There were actually two tests requested – a modification to the planned radio-tagged test, and a balloon-tag study, designed to look at the direct injury rates of fish passing through bays 7 and 8. The radio telemetry study started on May 3, and is designed to yield information on survival and fish behavior through bays 7 and 8. The study calls for 8 Kcfs of spill through both bays 7 and 8, plus 2 Kcfs of training spill through bay 10, for three hours each test day. A total of 45 fish are being released via a hose 45 feet in front of each bay, 12 feet in depth, four fish at a time. We're also releasing a control group – 64 fish per day – 1 kilometer below the dam. We believe that this test design will allow us to detect about a 3% difference in survival between bays 7 and 8, said Hevlin.

With respect to the balloon tag study, we didn't know at the meeting whether the Corps would be able to get this study underway, Hevlin said. We have just found out, though, that it will be possible to start this study as soon as the radio-tag study is finished, providing that it is still possible to collect the 1,000 or so fish needed for the study. The plan is to have two release locations in each bay – one shallow and one deep. The deep release location is the worst-case scenario, he said – that's where we've seen the highest injury rates in the past. The goal of this study is to compare injury rates for fish passing through bays 7 and 8; the study is designed to detect a 5% difference in injury rates between the two bays.

Hevlin noted that so far, during the radio-tag test, researchers have seen some fish delaying, for as much as 10 minutes. In other words, he said, the released fish aren't automatically sucked down and over the spill bay. One of the criticisms of direct

release in front of spill bays is that passage is not volitional – the fish don't have a choice. Seeing that some of the fish are swimming around tells us that the fish have some opportunity to swim around and choose their route of passage, he said.

So progress is going well, said Hevlin. Any update on the Ice Harbor RSW study? Ruff asked. It's underway, and going well, but it's too early to share any results, Hevlin replied – we're going through a two-treatment test, with two days of bulk spill followed by two days of RSW spill. The McNary two-treatment spill test is also going well, from what I understand, said Hevlin. In response to a question from Denny Rohr, Peters said final results from the balloon-tag study will be available within two months of the end of the test, but the final results from the radio-tag study will not be available until sometime this fall. In any event, I think we'll get some good information to help guide our decision about where to put the Lower Monumental RSW in December, Peters said.

Ruff asked whether Tweit had any update on the 2005 spring chinook run, and what happened to the fish this year? No, Tweit replied – clearly, we know the run is going to be much lower than forecast, but we don't know how much lower, or why the run is so much smaller than expected. We're continuing to manage the fisheries under the assumption that we've used up the non-treaty impacts; my understanding is that the tribes have also significantly scaled back their ceremonial and subsistence fisheries. It's too early to say what's happened this year, he said; the evidence is contradictory to date. The run in the Willamette is not looking that strong so far, but it's a bit early for that system, he said; other tributary runs are looking quite good. It's going to take us awhile to put this together, he said – we'll be looking at PIT tag data, the age composition of the run, and harvest data from the mainstem and various tributaries once all of the information is in. It may be that we're facing a generalized marine failure, or it could be that there are upriver and downriver differences, he said. The other factor is the marine mammal problem, of course, he said.

We have been hazing the sea lions out of the fish ladders at Bonneville, said Peters; we've been firing firecracker-type shells into the fishways to drive the animals out. There were four sea lions in the ladder yesterday, but the hazing has been pretty effective. One observation is that the animals have been much more aggressive this year – they are feeding right at the entrances of the fishways, which they didn't do last year. Starting this morning, we've begun an aggressive effort to drive the sea lions out of the tailrace area and downstream. That will be going on today and tomorrow, said Peters, and we'll have a report on how effective we were by early next week. We have also decided to install sea lion exclusion devices – “SLEDS” – a system of bars installed at the downstream end of the fishways – at Bonneville PH2 in early May. We'll be looking at how effective they are in excluding sea lions, as well as whether there are any impacts on salmon passage.

One other relevant issue is that, in the BiOp, it has been requested that the action agencies look forward to consider sea lion management actions, said Peters.

We have initiated a good collaborative effort for this year, but in my opinion, we need to start considering a longer-term strategy to deal with marine mammals, Peters said.

Will you be monitoring sea lion predation and consumption rates? John Palensky asked. We started doing that in the last week in April, Peters replied, so we will get an estimate on take this year. We appreciate the Corps' willingness to work on driving these animals out of the tailrace, said Tweit. The lack of flexibility in the Marine Mammal Protection Act is hampering these efforts, obviously; if we can obtain some flexibility in dealing with healthy populations of marine mammals, that would be very helpful. In response to a question from Rohr, Peters said sea lions do sometimes pass above Bonneville Dam, and have been seen as far upstream as Stevenson and Cascade Locks. It was noted that sea lions have also been observed taking very large sturgeon; Tweit said this is also a serious concern for WDFW.

Returning to Lower Monumental, David Wills said he had heard some disappointment regarding the fact that what was scheduled as a one-hour conference call on that issue stretched to two hours, and some IT members had to leave, including the USFWS representative. He said the Fish and Wildlife Service does not support the canister or balloon-tag studies; these seem to be contrary to the recommendation of the technical subgroup. I just wanted to note that for the record, Wills said. Does that mean USFWS will not support any conclusions we make based on the data we obtain this year, when the time comes to make the Lower Monumental RSW decision this December? Peters asked. We're going to wait and see what those results tell us, Wills replied, but we're not particularly encouraged by this study design, particularly because of the cannister release, and the lack of obtaining forebay behavior information.

4. Initial Work on Development of a Long-Range Work Plan for the IT.

Silverberg drew the group's attention to a memo titled "Suggested Initial Topics for IT Discussion Regarding Long-Term Work Plan Needs."

In the Council's Mainstem Amendments, they expressed a number of concerns about the way the Regional Forum was functioning, said Palensky. While this is a relatively low Council priority at the moment, they still have those concerns, one of which was the need for the IT to do more long-term planning, to avoid some of the annual firefights we seem to have – the standing issues, such as Libby/Hungry Horse operations, Spring Creek spill etc. It was important to the Council that we take a look at what else we might be able to do, on a longer-term planning horizon, so that we can get ahead of these issues and/or make assignments to the Regional Forum technical teams. We have been talking about this issue at NMFS and with others in the region, said Palensky, and the result of those discussions is this list.

Bruce Suzumoto said that there is a feeling in the region that IT is a very good forum for sharing information, discussion and dispute resolution. The Council's concern

has more to do with strategic, longer-term issues, getting ahead of the curve – rather than resolving in-season disputes, that the IT should instead try to work on some of these long-standing issues ahead of time. There was also a concern about how decisions are made, he said – people’s perception, in many cases, is that the federal agencies generally have a decision already made, or in mind, before they come to IT. They then float them out to the region, rather than involving the region in a more collaborative process, before the decisions are made. Third, he said, we saw a need for a broader representation in the discussion. Many issues facing the region also involve non-listed fish and resident fish, but most of the issues here revolve around listed species. The Council would also like to see greater consideration of the power and economic effects of the IT’s decisions. These are really just ideas at this point, said Suzumoto; staff floated a proposal on this issue to the Council a few months ago, but no action was taken on it. Kim Fodrea said Bonneville agrees with the overall goals of the Council’s suggestion; she noted that there have been a number of IT meetings cancelled in the past year, yet in looking at this list, there is obviously no shortage of issues we could be discussing.

Rohr suggested that it may make sense to broaden IT participation to include more expertise on the power side. Tweit noted that he is delegated by the Governor of Washington to participate in the implementation of the FCRPS BiOp. However, I am not a Washington Council member, he said; I’m uncomfortable venturing into some of the areas people are talking about, particularly those items related to the Northwest Power Act. I am more comfortable dealing with the issues that are covered under the Implementation Team’s mission statement, said Tweit; it would be more appropriate for a Washington Council member to address some of the issues on this list.

Palensky noted that the topic of IT scope and responsibilities has been the subject of extensive conversation within NMFS; the decision was that the IT should endeavor to reach consensus on recommendations to NMFS as to how to implement the FCRPS BiOp to benefit listed salmon. That’s not to say that charge can’t change, he said, but it would be a pretty fundamental change to ask the IT to try to balance the needs of non-listed species, the regional economy and power production against the needs of the listed species.

Our overall scope for the Regional Forum process is to work together in a collaborative environment to implement the NOAA Fisheries FCRPS BiOp for listed species, said Ruff. To talk about other issues would broaden that scope. We haven’t gone there yet, he said, but I’m hearing suggestions that we should consider that. A year ago in December, we started talking about some of these process issues; then the Council came in with their paper on how the Regional Forum process might be improved. One other issue we should discuss is how the decision-making process for this Forum might be improved, said Ruff.

My understanding of the Regional Forum process was that its purpose was to reach consensus on how best to implement the FCRPS BiOp for listed species, observed Wills – I don't see where consideration of the power impacts fits in there. Fodrea replied that the power side is already represented, because the 2004 BiOp is not that specific about, for example, how much water should be spilled each year. There are a lot of issues on which BPA is the only agency that is not on board, she said; if there were more power entities represented here, I think you'd see that BPA isn't as lonely a voice as it might appear.

Suzumoto observed that the Council understands the current charge of the Regional Forum; the question is whether the Regional Forum's scope and charge should be expanded to include additional viewpoints and areas of consideration. The question is whether all of the relevant information is getting in front of that decision-making body, he said; that was the spirit of the Council Amendment. The fact that the tribes aren't represented is a concern, he said. And that's the number one bullet on the list of potential topics, said Silverberg. Also, they are represented in the Regional Forum on issues of interest to them, Ruff said – it's not like the tribes are never here.

Twit said, again, he is not authorized to talk about broadening IT's mission. Perhaps the region will take that step, he said, but at this point, I can't participate in that discussion. Twit added that he listens to Dick Nason, Denny Rohr and other frequent power-side participants in the IT process as much as he listens to the other IT members; he said that, in his view, there are already multiple power-side perspectives presented at IT.

Tony Nigro said the intent was clear as to the mission of this group: to get the sovereign entities in the region to sit down and develop a consensus interpretation of the intent of the BiOp measures and how they should be implemented. The RPAs, and now the UPA, supposedly meet the test of being reasonable and prudent, Nigro said. The consultation process considered all of the other issues associated with being reasonable and prudent, and the role of this body was to discuss the specific intent and implementation of those measures. I think we've done a good job of balancing competing needs, Nigro said – you don't have to look any further than our discussions of Libby/Hungry Horse operations. As Bill said, I sit here as a representative of the Governor's office, not as a representative of the Oregon Council members, and I receive very specific policy guidance. If the range of viewpoints engaged at this table is deficient, he said, I think you have to hold the participants responsible. Oregon would be reluctant to make a major change in the scope of the IT's charge at this time, he said.

I would agree with Bill and Tony, said Dick Nason – I've been here forever, and after the 1993 BiOp, people complained that the states and tribes didn't know what the action agencies were doing. In my view, the IT agendas have become weaker and weaker over the years – as was mentioned earlier, a number of meetings have even

been cancelled since this fall, when there are clearly many topics we could be discussing. The IT meetings always used to go from 9 to 4, and it is the kind of issues on this memo that are no longer being discussed. Participation – from the states, tribes and even from the federal agencies, has diminished. To me, said Nason, that is not a positive development.

Peters said that, from a Corps perspective, it may be OK to expand the IT's focus beyond the BiOp, but there are still plenty of issues within the scope of the BiOp that aren't being addressed. For example, what about a more focused discussion about what to do with the research information we're collecting, and where should those research programs go from here? What are the big issues we're having trouble with, within the scope of the BiOp? We need to address those before we begin to talk about expanding the scope of the IT, he said.

I didn't view Bruce's suggestion as expanding the scope of the IT, said Fodrea – I viewed his suggestion as one in which power issues would receive greater consideration within the implementation of the BiOp. That's correct, said Suzumoto – the implementation of the BiOp has impacts on a wide array of parties within the region. I'm not questioning the decision-making process for implementing the BiOp – I just think the IT needs to be sure it has all of the relevant information in front of it before it makes those recommendations. And again, said Wills, I don't think anyone has ever been prevented from presenting information at any of the Regional Forum meetings. If you're talking about expanding the IT membership, however, that's not something we, in this body, can do.

Silverberg noted that the necessity of producing the 2004 FCRPS BiOp, and working on the ongoing litigation, took the wind out of the IT's sails throughout 2004. Now that that process is drawing to a close, she said, I think this is a great opportunity for the IT to re-energize itself, and to address some of these longer-term issues. The facilitation team is ready and willing to help IT by producing more forward-looking agendas, and in encouraging additional participation from other parties in the region.

Palensky said that, in Jim Litchfield's (Montana's) view, the IT is too fish-centric, and that the representation here is not the right level of representation – it should include more people whose role is to balance the needs of listed species, non-listed species and power.

With that, the IT turned its attention to the potential issues list. The items on the list (added to during today's meeting) include:

Regional Forum Process

- Plan for outreach to the tribes to garner participation and input
- Deal with unrealistic ideas some have by better defining IT/TMT boundaries

- Plan for integrating the Regional Forum with the Council process (Mainstem Amendment) as opposed to creating a new forum
- Broadening discussion and participation in the Regional Forum process

Water Management Plan

- Develop criteria for Spring Creek Hatchery release spill
- Develop a long-term plan for managing chum flows
- Stewardship of sturgeon – in good water years, is there a way to do more?
- Be out in front with agreements about basic operating criteria. Look at the Water Management Plan in the fall and consider changes for the following year. What was the intention of the BiOp, and how are we going to operate to the key management issues?
- Undertake a section-by-section review of the Water Management Plan during the spring/summer update. Document what we agree on, what we don't and why. The more precise we can get, the more consistency we will have.
- Look at spill relative to transport and other mainstem factors.
- TDG monitoring below Bonneville and its impacts on spill

Decision Criteria

- Develop a decision framework for spill decisions given current and future RSW installation plans
- Framework for balancing resident fish needs at Libby, Hungry Horse and Grand Coulee

Planning

- Look at populations and how they are responding to the actions being taken
- How are we going to address lamprey needs? May be passage issues with RSWs. Corps is looking at Lamprey Assisted Passage (LAPS). When salmon actions conflict with lamprey, what is the priority? Get it out on the table.
- Plan for the system flood control study.
- Long-term plan for addressing the sea lion problem at Bonneville

RM&E

- Fall chinook transport study
- ISAB 2005 load following study
- Ongoing kelt studies – how should this work, now in its 5th year, make the transition from study to management actions, in terms of improving *downstream* passage for adult steelhead?
- Reservoir-type fall chinook, the need for more information on this life-history and the implications of this population on transportation and other system

- management actions
- Upper Columbia summer reservoir-type chinook – the need for more information on this life-history

Palensky noted that, every month, he sends out an email to the IT membership requesting any suggestions for additional IT agenda items, but receives little or no input. The group then devoted a few minutes of discussion to the items on the long-term work plan topics list.

Peters noted that the Corps management has made it very clear that they would like to see a comprehensive fall chinook management plan developed. Ruff gave the group a heads-up that the Libby/Hungry Horse issue will be coming back this summer; I would like to get out in front of that, and start talking about it next month, he said. How can we help guide and facilitate that discussion through TMT and IT? he asked – that's definitely a topic we need to discuss.

Lori Postlethwait said she and Tony Norris have been discussing topics the IT might be able to engage on in order to assist and inform the TMT's deliberations. These include triggers for the start of spill, triggers for managing for chum vs management for the spring outmigration, the effects of reverse loading at Bonneville on chum, guidance on the priority of spring vs. summer flows, and Bonneville spill at low flows.

With respect to Spring Creek Hatchery spill, said Wills, there are several layers going on, including the discussions under US v. Oregon under which the Spring Creek Hatchery release may even be eliminated. That's not really a BiOp issue, Wills noted, except to the extent this operation impacts emerging chum. Another issue is the operation of the B2 corner collector, and how effective it is at passing fish without increasing gas levels. Is it more effective, in this context, than the spill program we used to get? he said. We have some time to work on that issue in other forums, but at some point between now and next March, it would probably be a good idea for the IT to discuss Spring Creek spill. Perhaps this would fall under the "Long-term management of chum flows" bullet, Wills suggested.

Tweit said it might be useful for the IT to ask the TMT to think about upcoming, recurring issues, and perhaps to generate both a list of these issues and a range of possible solutions. We might then consider more of an interactive process between TMT and IT in developing an approach to those issues, he said. It would certainly be helpful if we could generate an approach, schedule and framework for resolving some of these predictable upcoming issues, said Suzumoto. He added that it would also make sense for the IT to consider the question of how best to engage in the upcoming regional review of the Corps' recon-level report on the system flood control study – once we see what that report says, in June, the IT may want to talk about some sort of a decision framework. Fodrea suggested that the upcoming RSW decision at Lower

Monumental is another issue on which decision criteria will be needed.

Peters said it would also be useful if the SCT and IT could continue to discuss the ongoing RSW prioritization process – the upcoming decisions about which projects should be the next to receive RSWs, and when. There was general agreement that this is a very important issue. Peters said the Corps is developing a strawman RSW action plan which will be provided to the technical teams – FFDRWG and SCT – in June. We'll put it on the IT's August agenda, said Silverberg.

Suzumoto suggested that it would be useful for the IT to frame some of the issues these technical bodies should be considering – to be proactive in helping to guide their deliberations, in other words, rather than simply waiting for those technical groups to deliver their recommendations. We could certainly give them guidance as to the BiOp objectives a given project is intended to satisfy, Suzumoto said.

Silverberg asked the group to consider which of these items they would consider to be the highest priorities. Going to the white-board, she asked each participant for his or her preferences. This list included the following:

- Increased tribal participation
- Increased emphasis on the items under the Water Management Plan subheading, above, including increased IT/TMT interaction on upcoming, recurring issues
- Decision criteria for the system flood control study
- The fall chinook transport/life history study
- ISAB's Load following Study
- Kelts
- Regional Forum process refinements
- Bonneville spill volumes/TDG monitoring – needs immediate attention
- Long-term planning for management of chum flows
- IT review of the Implementation Plan – are there items that need more review and discussion?
- Response to the ISAB's proposed load following study – a potentially very significant management issue
- Libby/Hungry Horse
- The Corps' strawman RSW action plan
- Pinipeds – what activities does the IT need to take responsibility for?
- Finally, what about a decision framework for these issues – why are these topics important, how should they be prioritized, and why? Some suggestions included timeliness to upcoming decisions, practicality/cost effectiveness, the extent to which they will contribute to the implementation of the BiOp, certainty of biological/economic benefits.
- RM&E-related topics should receive a high priority, because the prioritization process is already underway for FY'06 research projects.

After a few minutes of discussion, it was agreed that the flood control decision criteria, response to the ISAB load following study, the fall chinook transport/life history study, a WQT update on the Bonneville spill management/Camas Washougal adequacy issue and summer operations at Libby/Hungry Horse need to be on the IT's June agenda.

5. Next IT Meeting Date.

The next Implementation Team meeting was set for Thursday, June 2. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor. (Meeting lasted until 1:30)